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The Works of Shakespeare

TIMON OF ATHENS

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Complete and Uncut in the text of THE NEW SHAKESPEARE

edited by John Dover Wilson

TIMON OF ATHENS

recorded by THE MARLOWE SOCIETY and PROFESSIONAL PLAYERS

directed by GEORGE RYLANDS under the auspices of THE BRITISH COUNCIL

Timon of Athens is a tragic torso; unfinished, it would seem, or defaced by time and chance, or unskilfully restored and tinkered with. Yet this tragic torso is sublime and formidable. When Robert Bridges at last gave the world the posthumous volume of his friend G. M. Hopkins' poems, he printed *The Wreck of the Deutschland* first and compared it to "a great dragon folded in the gate to forbid all entrance, and confident in his strength from past success". If *Timon* stood in the forefront of the First Folio instead of *The Tempest*, who would brave the dragon? The tragedy is seldom acted and almost as seldom read. And if we do ponder upon it, our image of "the gentle Shakespeare", "mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare", "of an open and free nature", "a happy imitator of Nature and most gentle expresser of it" —all contemporary tributes—may well be cracked into a hundred shivers like the mirror of Richard, that sweet lovely rose. Hopkins' elegy or dithyramb is a passionate confession of faith in Christ, Shakespeare's *Timon* is an indictment of humanity more bitter and more pitiless than Juvenal's; and when at last Timon salutes

> his everlasting mansion
> Upon the beachéd verge of the salt flood,
> Who once a day with his embosséd froth
> The turbulent surge shall cover . . . . . .

we may recall Jonathan Swift's own epitaph who lies in St. Patrick's Cathedral, *ubi saeva indignatio ulterius cor lacerare nequit*. Indeed it is to be noted that there are religious overtones in *Timon*. Wronged and betrayed and self-banished, condemning the whole human race, he finds in Flavius, his loving steward, a singularly honest man. We remember Abraham pleading with God not to destroy the righteous with the wicked, to save the city for the sake of fifty, forty, thirty, twenty, ten; and the Lord said "I will not destroy it for ten's sake". We remember the lost piece of silver and the one sinner in a hundred that repenteth. We remember Isabella's plea

> Why, all the souls that were were forfeit once,
> And He that might the vantage best have took
> Found out the remedy . . .

So Flavius redeems himself and, for us if not for Timon, redeems mankind:

> Had I a steward
> So true, so just, and now so comfortable?
> It almost turns my dangerous nature mild.
> Let me behold thy face. Surely, this man
> Was born of woman?
> Forgive my general and exceptless rashness,
> You perpetual-sober gods! I do proclaim
> One honest man—mistake me not, but one;
> No more, I pray—and he's a steward.
> How fain would I have hated all mankind
> And thou redeem'st thyself.

The tragedy is more a parable than a play; it is a morality or exemplum from a *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*, such as that fat fair prelate, Chaucer's Monk, connoisseur of horse and hound and roast swan, recited for the edification of his fellow pilgrims, until the Knight "stynteth him of his tale" after fifteen illustrations, rightly pointing out that for most people a "litel hevynesse" goes a long way. To the mediaeval mind

> Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie,
> As olde bookes maken us memorie
> Of hymn that stood in greet prosperitee,
> And is yfallen out of heigh degree
> Into miserie, and endeth wrecchedly.

The plot is no more than a simple reversal of fortune; as simple as the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus, but concerned with man as a social animal and not with gods. "It is a domestick tragedy," says Dr. Johnson, "and therefore strongly fastens on the attention of the reader. In the plan there is not much art, but the incidents are natural and the characters various and exact. The catastrophe affords a very powerful warning against that ostentatious liberality which scatters bounty, but confers no benefits, and buys flattery, but not friendship." There is more art than Johnson allows. Highly effective is the contrast between the first three acts, when the stage is crowded with the great lords and their households—the coming and going, the fawning and feasting and compliments, the life "below stairs"—and the last two acts where a truly noble nature is alone with Nature, "Whose womb unmeasurable and infinite breast Teems and feeds all", an outcast of the woods, in his case on the verge of the sea. So is the character contrast between Timon, who renounces his true self and goes against his nature like Lear, and the professional misanthrope Apemantus, whose nature is that of a cur; a cur, however, whose bark sometimes gives way to superb eloquence. And then again, Shakespeare, who creates by juxtapositions, interconnects with Timon the wronged and ruthless soldier Alcibiades, who wars against his own country. Alcibiades makes us think of Coriolanus. Plutarch, in fact, paired them together in his *Parallel Lives* as examples of soldiers of genius forced into exile and treason through the wrongs inflicted on them by their compatriots; and the two tragedies, which belong roughly to the same date, have more than a little in common. *Timon* fails as a tragedy because we miss the "tragic flaw" in the hero and that inner conflict which is the main-spring of tragedy. This is true to a lesser degree of Coriolanus. And the blind, childish, self-willed prodigality of Timon is not far removed from the innocence and obstinacy of Caius Marcius, whom A. C. Bradley dubbed "a huge boy, altogether too simple and too ignorant of himself. Though he is the proudest man in Shakespeare he seems to be unaware of his pride". The detestation of Timon for the corrupt and fickle plutocrats is matched by that of Coriolanus for the mutable, rank-scented mob. The one rejects the highest, the other the lowest stratum of society. "I banish you," cries Caius Marcius; and similarly Timon turns his back upon "all feasts, societies and throngs of men". In both plays we have a double assessment of man, as part of the structure of church and state, pomp and ceremony, authority and degree, and as man in isolation, face to face with nature, the animal kingdom and his own soul. In *Coriolanus*, as in several of the histories, the hero is revealed to us as public and private man: he has to face mother, wife and child—the natural law. *Timon*, on the other hand, is specifically an indictment of wealth. The magnanimous man who has given away infinite riches is denied by his friends and flatterers, and then, with tragic irony, digging in nature's plenteous bosom for one poor root, lights upon yellow, glittering, precious gold, the king-killer, the bright defiler of Hymen's purest bed, the touch of hearts, which can make black white, foul fair, wrong right.

But *Timon*'s real affinity is with *Lear*. The moral and spiritual content are largely the same. It almost seems to be a by-product of the greater work, or a residue of the material out of which *Lear* has been carved. Edgar in his mock-madness describes himself as a serving man debauched by all the vices of society, which Kent condemns in the flunkey Oswald. In *Timon* it is the masters, not the servants, who are corrupted. (Johnson rightly notes that "nothing contributes more to the exaltation of Timon's character than the zeal and fidelity of his servants. Nothing but real virtue can be honoured by domesticks; nothing but impartial kindness can gain affection from dependants"). The noble Edgar takes "The basest and most poorest shape That ever penury in contempt of man Brought near to beast"; he becomes poor unaccommodated man, a bare forked animal, the thing itself. Even so Timon cries "Nothing I'll bear from thee But nakedness, thou detestable town". The continuous play upon animal imagery, the relation between man and beast in *Lear* is summed up in

> Timon shall to the woods where he shall find
> The unkindest beast more kinder than mankind.

Lear's obsession in his madness with sexual depravity, which is not organic to the play, finds fuller and even fiercer utterance in Timon's horrific incitements and exhortations to Phrynia and Timandra.

> Consumptions sow
> In hollow bones of man; strike their sharp shins,
> and mar men's spurring . . . Make curled-pate
> ruffians bald;
> And let the unscarred braggarts of the war
> Derive some pain from you. Plague all,
> That your activity may defeat and quell
> The source of all erection.

Both tragedies find sophisticated man, proud false ingrateful man, whore-master man, who with "liquorish draughts and morsels unctuous greases his pure mind", guiltier than the beasts, unkinder than the elements, unnatural sons of our common mother. *Timon of Athens* does not make easy reading; it is not likely to draw audiences in the theatre, although an extraordinary version by Thomas Shadwell was very popular in the first half of the eighteenth century, in which a love-interest was introduced, substituting for the faithful steward a devoted mistress who stabbed herself at Timon's death. Some may find therefore that it comes into its own more than most plays in the recorded version. The third scene of the fourth Act, which runs to more than five hundred lines, is as remarkable a piece of writing as is to be found in the whole canon. Only Shakespeare could have written it. Yet it is almost unknown.

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TIMON OF ATHENS

recorded by

THE MARLOWE SOCIETY

and

PROFESSIONAL PLAYERS

The Scene: Athens and neighbourhood

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

TIMON, *a noble Athenian*

SEMPRONIUS, LUCULLUS, LUCIUS } *flattering lords*

VENTIDIUS, *one of Timon's false friends*

ALCIBIADES, *an Athenian captain*

APEMANTUS, *a churlish philosopher*

FLAVIUS, *steward to Timon*

Poet, Painter, Jeweller, and Merchant

An old Athenian

FLAMINIUS, LUCILIUS, SERVILIUS } *servants to Timon*

CAPHIS, PHILOTUS, TITUS, HORTENSIUS, *And others* } *servants to Timon's creditors and to the Lords*

A Page. A Fool. Three Strangers

PHRYNIA, TIMANDRA } *mistresses to Alcibiades*

Cupid and Amazons in the masque

Other Lords, Senators, Officers, Banditti, and Attendants

THE ACTION OF THE PLAY

ACT ONE

SIDE 1 *Scene 1* Amongst the crowd of lords and merchants thronging the ante-room of the Lord Timon in Athens are a poet and a painter. With a jeweller they discuss the bounty and generosity of Timon. Trumpets sound as Timon himself enters *addressing himself courteously to every suitor* and followed by Lucilius and his other servants. He promises to redeem Ventidius' debts and to provide a dowry for Lucilius to marry the daughter of an old Athenian. As Timon talks affably with the poet, the painter and the jeweller, Apemantus approaches. He is cynical, misanthropic and insulting. A trumpet sounds and Alcibiades is announced. Timon greets him warmly despite the sneers of Apemantus, and draws the whole throng into the house, leaving Apemantus alone. Two Lords on their way to Timon's feast, exchange badinage with the misanthrope, then blessing the bounty of Timon and his ten-fold requital of every gift, themselves enter the house.

hate men. Apemantus congratulates himself on not being a prodigal, and sums up Timon's character: *The middle of humanity thou never knewest, but the extremity of both ends.* Both men break down into senseless cursing against each other. Timon is now so weary of the falsity of the world that he intends to prepare his grave. Addressing the gold, he implores it to set men at odds so that the animals shall inherit the earth. Apemantus threatens to go to Athens to tell men of the gold so that Timon's solitude shall again be violated. With a final curse, he leaves. Still Timon has no peace. Three bandits have come to rob him. He dumbfounds them by praising their trade, the most common and commendable in the world. Even natural things—the sun, the moon, the sea—are thieves. He presses the gold upon them. Flavius, watching Timon, is shocked by the change in his master. Timon grudges the necessity of admitting that Flavius could be an exception to his hatred of mankind: his kindness is merely a more subtle form of covetousness. Then, when Flavius' honesty is plainly sincere, Timon begs him to leave him.

ACT FIVE

SIDE 6 *Scene 1* Word of Timon's gold has reached Athens. The poet and the painter have come to seek him out. Crouching in his cave, Timon listens to them, then emerging greets them with feigned affability as *honest men.* Unable to assess his mood, they improvise, until openly cursing them, he gives them the gold and drives them away. Flavius is still in hiding nearby and waylays two senators from Athens who have come to seek Timon's aid against Alcibiades. Timon rejoices to hear of Alcibiades' plans to sack Athens: let every Athenian leave the city and hang himself upon a nearby tree. He himself will build his grave upon the shore where the sea will daily wash his gravestone. He retires into his cave again, and the senators return to Athens.

Scene 2 Outside the city walls, news is brought of Alcibiades' advance, and Timon's refusal of aid.

Scene 3 A soldier sent by Alcibiades finds Timon's tomb in the woods with an epitaph carved upon it. He cannot read, but takes a wax impression to give to his General.

Scene 4 Alcibiades appears before the walls of Athens with his army. On his orders the trumpet *sounds a parley* and *the Senators appear upon the walls.* Alcibiades threatens to revenge himself upon the *coward and lascivious town.* The Senators promise that if he will abjure wholesale revenge, and punish only those who have deserved it, he shall freely enter the town. Alcibiades agrees, and the gates are flung open. The soldier brings him the wax impression of Timon's epitaph. Reading it, Alcibiades adds his own tribute to the noble Timon, and enters the city in peace.

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Scene 2 With *hautboys playing loud music, a great banquet is being served in* Timon's house. Timon leads in his guests, among them Alcibiades, Ventidius and a large number of lords and senators. *Then comes, dropping after all, Apemantus, discontentedly like himself.* Ventidius, now enriched by the sudden death of his father, wishes to repay Timon. Timon refuses, he dislikes requital. Turning to his guests, he bids them sit and share his fortunes with him, however uncertain these may be. As the banquet proceeds with the cynical comments of Apemantus, the flattery of the lords, the soldierly brevity of Alcibiades, Timon emotionally addresses his friends, and is moved to tears as he defines his ideal of friendship. Suddenly a tucket sounds, a servant announces the arrival of a group of ladies preceded by Cupid.

SIDE 2

(*continued*). Cupid hails Timon and "all that of his bounties taste." As music sounds, Cupid re-enters with *a masque of Ladies dressed as Amazons, with lutes in their hands, dancing and playing. The Lords rise from table, with much adoring of Timon, and to show their loves, each singles out an Amazon, and all dance, men with women, a lofty strain or two to the hautboys, and cease.* Timon thanks them, invites them to a banquet in an adjoining room, and summons his steward Flavius to fetch a casket of jewels. Lamenting his master's prodigality,—*'tis pity bounty had not eyes behind*—Flavius fetches the casket. Timon distributes the jewels and in an orgy of giving and receiving, commented on mournfully by the honest Flavius and caustically by Apemantus, the banquet ends.

ACT TWO

Scene 1 The reckoning which Flavius has dreaded is imminent. One of the Athenian senators sends his servant Caphis to Timon to importune him for the repayment of his debts.

Scene 2 In Timon's house, *Flavius with many bills in hand* is beset by Caphis and by the servants of the money-lenders Isidore and Varro. Timon, high-spirited after a morning's hunting with Alcibiades, tries to brush aside their importunities, then asking Alcibiades to continue on his way, orders Flavius to protect him from their demands at least until he and his friends have dined. He follows Alcibiades into the house. While they are dining, Apemantus, a Fool and a Page exchange pleasantries with the usurers' men. As Timon and Flavius re-enter, Apemantus and the Fool leave, and the servants withdraw. Timon is angry that Flavius had not revealed to him long ere this the extent of his debts. Flavius reminds him that all attempts to curb his prodigal generosity had been thrust aside. Still Timon will not acknowledge his own folly—*unwisely, not ignobly, have I given.* Now is his chance to rely upon his many friends. Calling his servants, he sends some of them to Lucius and Lucullus, but is restrained by Flavius from sending them to the senators whom the steward has already fruitlessly approached. Then let Flavius got to Ventidius: he will not fail him. Though Timon has regained confidence, Flavius is still sceptical: *bounty . . . Being free itself, it thinks all others so.*

ACT THREE

Scene 1 Flavius' scepticism is justified. Timon's servant Flaminius, come to borrow money from Lucullus, is met at first with flattery, but then with contempt and prevarication when he reveals his true errand. He curses Lucullus and departs.

SIDE 3

Scene 2 Already news of Timon's difficulties are current in Athens. Three men, strangers to the town, tell Lucius, another of Timon's one-time toadies, what they hear. Lucius declares himself ready to help Timon, but when he is asked

by Timon's servant, Servilius, he too prevaricates, and professes himself short of ready money. The strangers comment upon this: it is those to whom Timon has been most generous who now are least ready to help him.

Scene 3 Another of Timon's servants appeals to Sempronius to come to his master's rescue. Sempronius pretends to take offence that Timon should only approach him after being denied by his other friends, and likewise refuses his help.

Scene 4 All is changed in the hall of Timon's house. It is now thronged with the servants of his creditors. They shrewdly comment on the change in his fortunes. Flavius, entering *in a cloak, muffled,* refuses to answer their importunities; Servilius entreats them to leave his master in peace, but it is too late. Timon *enters in a rage* and wildly curses them as they press upon him waving their bills in their hands. Cowed by his threats, they jostle each other out. Timon sends Flavius to bid all his friends to a last feast.

Scene 5 Alcibiades has come to the Senate to plead for the life of one of his friends, a brave soldier, condemned to death for killing a man in defence of his reputation. But neither this man's service nor that of Alcibiades himself weigh with the Senators, who pronounce a sentence of banishment upon Alcibiades. He wrathfully comments upon their ingratitude and devotion to usury: he will use his banishment to plot the downfall of Athens.

Scene 6 Again the tables are being set out for a feast in the banqueting-room at Timon's house. The Lords and Senators bidden to the feast are reassured about the state of Timon's fortunes. He greets them, brushing aside their protestations of regret at their inability to lend him money. They are seated, the dishes are placed before them, Timon says a grace which deteriorates into an invective against the usurious Lords, ending *Uncover, dogs, and lap.* The dishes are uncovered and seen to be full of warm water and stones. In a mounting rage of curses, Timon throws the water at his guests and as they jostle out rains them with stones and curses.

ACT FOUR

SIDE 4 *Scene 1* Outside the walls of Athens, Timon pronounces a curse upon the town. He will take to the woods *where he shall find The unkindest beast more kinder than mankind.*

Scene 2 Left behind in Athens, Timon's servants mourn his departure. Distributing his remaining money amongst them, Flavius leaves to join his master.

Scene 3 Alone in the woods, Timon considers the nature of fortune and his hatred of all men, even of himself. Digging for roots, he comes upon gold and sardonically praises it as the strongest influence in men's lives. He begins to return it to the earth, but hearing a drum, he keeps some of it out. It is Alcibiades who appears *with drum and fife, in warlike manner.* With him are his mistresses, Phrynia and Timandra. His concern about Timon angers his one-time friend. He thrusts gold upon the soldier so that he may more bloodily prosecute the war against Athens, and more gold upon the whores for the furthering of their disease-ridden trade. Alcibiades, failing to renew their friendship, marches away with his army and camp-followers.

SIDE 5 Timon returns to his digging. Apemantus arrives, to argue with Timon on the nature of true misanthropy. For him Timon is not a real misanthrope, but only one made so by ill-fortune which he would reverse if he could. But for Timon, Apemantus, who has never known flattery or good fortune, and thus never tasted the true bitterness of their reversal, has no reason to

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TIMON OF ATHENS

by WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Recorded under the auspices of THE BRITISH COUNCIL

ACT ONE

Scene 1. Athens. A hall in Timon's house

Scene 2. A banqueting room in Timon's house

The Marlowe Society and Professional Players

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ACT ONE

Scene 2 (concluded). A banqueting room in Timon's house

ACT TWO

Scene 1. A senator's house

Scene 2. Before Timon's house

ACT THREE

Scene 1. A room in Lucullus's house

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ACT THREE

Scene 2. A public place

Scene 3. A room in Sempronius's house

Scene 4. A hall in Timon's house

Scene 5. The Senate House

Scene 6. A banqueting room in Timon's house

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ACT FOUR

Scene 1. Without the walls of Athens

Scene 2. Athens. Timon's house

Scene 3. Woods and a cave near the sea-shore

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ACT FOUR

Scene 3 (concluded). Woods and a cave near the sea-shore

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ACT FIVE

Scene 1. The woods. Before Timon's cave
Scene 2. The walls of Athens
Scene 3. The woods
Scene 4. The walls of Athens

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